

March 27, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

This week I have continued to be a voice for our military personnel stationed in the First District and across the nation. Throughout the week I attended hearings which gave input into the status of our maritime forces and particularly the decision to move a carrier from Norfolk, VA to Mayport, FL. Also, I joined members from across the aisle in the Virginia to advocate that the Air Force should place its newly formed CYBER Command at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton.

First, as a member of the Readiness Subcommittee I attended a hearing on the readiness and sustainment of the Navy's surface fleet. During this time I was able to continue to highlight my great concern with the Navy's decision to create a second East Coast homeport for a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier at Naval Station Mayport. In attendance was Rear Admiral Philip H. Cullom who is Director of the Fleet Readiness Division, as well as Rear Admiral Joseph F. Campbell, who serves as Director of Staff, Fleet Maintenance Officers.

My intended goal was to show that the Navy's decision is both fiscally unfeasible and tactically unsound. My concerns were echoed later in the week when I attended another hearing as a member of the Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee on the requirements for the future capabilities of United States maritime forces. I particularly questioned how ship maintenance and readiness will be conducted on a nuclear aircraft carrier should the Navy move forward with their plan. I also questioned how the Navy justifies the added costs of moving a carrier when future fleet readiness and maintenance is already at risk in the current budget environment.

Outside groups, including both the Lexington Institute and a Senior Naval Analyst for the non-partisan Congressional Research Service agreed with conventional wisdom that moving a carrier at this time would cause financially irresponsible redundancy in facilities and personnel, and increase the security demands on our over-burdened fleet.

Next, on Wednesday evening I was joined by Senator Mark Warner (VA) and Congressman Glenn Nye (VA-2), in a meeting with Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley in an effort to push for the placement of the Air Force's CYBER Command at Langley Air Force Base in Hampton. The CYBER Command is charged with protecting our nation from an electronic "Pearl Harbor". I was pleased to meet with Secretary Donley and had a great discussion on the preexisting assets at Langley as well as the benefits to not only the Air Force, but the region as a whole in standing up CYBER Command there. The Air Force is set to release their decision on March 31st and I want to continue to take every opportunity to promote the Hampton Roads region while the process is still in motion.

The Hampton Roads region has the largest concentration of military personnel on the East Coast and a local work force with the technical skills and security clearances to make CYBER Command successful from day one; so it makes absolute sense from a mission standpoint. The Commonwealth of Virginia has long been a national leader in innovative and cutting-edge technology, and Hampton Roads is a key reason for that reputation. Currently, there are over 650,000 miles of fiber optic cable in Hampton Roads and much of it is unused today.

The local government also is military-friendly and has experience working with the Air Force to meet their unique needs. When the Global Cyber Integration Center was created two years ago, Hampton worked with a local developer to construct a facility to military specifications that met Air Force anti-terrorism building standards and a state-of-the-art communications infrastructure in less than a year. Although, I received no indication from Secretary Donley on whether

the Air Force will place CYBER Command at Langley, he did assure me that in no way are any Langley facilities or installations at risk if CYBER Command were to be located elsewhere around the country.

These developments this week here in Washington will continue to evolve over the coming months. With that in mind, I will continue to use my position as a member of the House Armed Services Committee to promote the First District and fight on the side of those currently serving in the military as well as our veterans who have served so honorably in the past. The military plays a crucial role in our district and I aim to keep it that way.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.